

Idaho State Rail Plan

Adopted by the Idaho Transportation Board

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Prepared by

Idaho Transportation Department
Transportation Planning Division

3311 West State Street
PO Box 7129
Boise, ID 83707-1129

With assistance from

Wilbur Smith Associates

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Idaho Rail Advisory Council

Jim Hawkings, Chair, Idaho Department of Commerce
Mike Everett, Idaho Department of Agriculture
Mary Hartung, Office of the Governor
Ron Law, Idaho Public Utilities Commission
Ray Mickelson, Idaho Transportation Department

Other Rail Council Participants and Support Staff

Charles Clark, Union Pacific Railroad
Tonya Clark, Idaho Public Utilities Commission
Don Howell, Idaho Public Utilities Commission
Pat Keim, Burlington Northern Railroad
Ron Kerr, Idaho Transportation Department
Kelly Olson, Idaho Barley Commission
Karl Tueller, Idaho Department of Commerce

Idaho Transportation Department Rail Plan Task Force

Ron Kerr, Transportation Planning
Bryan Loftin, District 3
Steve Loop, Materials
Lee Wilson, Traffic
Jim Witherell, Economics and Research

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The 1996 Idaho Rail Plan Update serves as the railroad modal plan for the Idaho Transportation Plan (ITP). The ITP was completed and published in April 1995 and is a statewide intermodal long-range transportation plan that is to guide the state's transportation decisions into the 21st century. The ITP proposes a vision for transportation in the year 2015 and beyond and sets goals, objectives and strategies that need to be carried out in order to achieve the vision. As such, it sets broad strategic direction to transportation system improvements based on a continuing planning process. The plan focuses on the development and maintenance of a true multimodal transportation system to meet the state's transportation needs, not to promote any one mode at the expense of others.

Also, the State Rail Plan, prepared pursuant to Section 5(g) of the Department of Transportation Act as amended by the Local Rail Service Reauthorizing Act, December 11, 1989, is a prerequisite for eligibility to receive local rail freight assistance. The act requires "an adequate plan for rail services in such State, including a suitable process for updating, revising and amending such plan; and that such State plan is administered or coordinated by a designated State agency and provides for the equitable distribution of resources."

Designated Agency

Section 803 of Public Law 94-210 (The Railroad Revitalization and Regulatory Reform Act of 1976 -- predecessor legislation) requires that an agency of the State of Idaho be designated the authority and administrative jurisdiction to receive and expend such federal assistance. Governor Andrus designated the Idaho Transportation Department as the agency responsible for Local Rail Service Assistance in 1976; subsequent Governor's Executive Orders and legislative changes to Idaho Code have kept the designation current through the present.

Local Rail Freight Assistance

The purpose of the federal Local Rail Freight Assistance (LRFA) program is to provide rail service assistance funds to states in order to develop, promote, supervise and support safe, adequate, and efficient rail freight transportation services.

The intent of Congress was that each state should:

- 1) Establish a state rail planning process which shall be based on a comprehensive, coordinated and continuing planning process for all transportation services within the state.
- 2) Preserve rail service when it is in the public interest.
- 3) Anticipate the impact of rail abandonments and assess the relative benefits of rail or highway system improvements.
- 4) Implement programs that invest in railroad projects which are justified on their own merit and/or cost-effective alternatives to other improvements.

Idaho has participated in the federal assistance program since 1977, with the first project grant in 1980. Federal funding from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has provided the basis for a comprehensive state rail planning and project assistance program.

State Transportation Goals and Objectives

The State's rail planning efforts have been conducted within the broad goals of the Idaho Transportation Plan (ITP).

ITP Goals

The ITP goals and objectives are summarized in Table 1-1 . More detail is available in the ITP.

Goal 1: Transportation Improvement Will Promote and Sustain Safe and Efficient Movement of People, Goods, Services, and Information.

Objectives A and B are particularly applicable to the rail mode. Certain transportation demands can only be efficiently met by the rail when considering distances, volumes and interchange costs . The commodities comprising Idaho's rail traffic and origins/destinations are shown in Table 2-3 and Figures 2-3 through 2-9 in Chapter 2. Meeting the transportation

Table 1-1

IDAHO TRANSPORTATION GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

GOAL 1: TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS WILL PROMOTE AND SUSTAIN SAFE AND EFFICIENT MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE, GOODS, SERVICES AND INFORMATION.

OBJECTIVE A: Stimulate economic growth and job creation through transportation investments.

- Strategy 1: Create jobs through transportation investments and transportation products and services,
- Strategy 2: Secure defense conversion and other funds,
- Strategy 3: Employ advanced transportation technology,
- Strategy 4: Provide for tourists.

OBJECTIVE B: Support the economy by aiding efficient goods movement.

- Strategy 1: Improve coordination of statewide intermodal goods movement,
- Strategy 2: Modify project programming criteria, to more equitably include goods movement,
- Strategy 3: Foster technological and operations innovations,
- Strategy 4: Foster efficient small package delivery,
- Strategy 5: Plan for goods movements in transportation projects,
- Strategy 6: Include goods movements in Intermodal management system.

OBJECTIVE C: Provide a reasonably safe and secure travel environment.

- Strategy 1: Provide safety & security measures for pedestrians & transit users,
- Strategy 2: Ensure the personal safety of passengers on transit vehicles by assessing risk and security factors,
- Strategy 3: Provide bicycle security racks and other accommodations on buses,
- Strategy 4: Provide a reasonably safe roadway environment,
- Strategy 5: Develop a highway safety management system,
- Strategy 6: Provide driver licensing measures that promote safety.

OBJECTIVE D: Utilize new technologies to promote alternatives to transportation and improve safety and the environment.

- Strategy 1: Encourage the use of telecommunications to reduce vehicular travel,
- Strategy 2: Encourage revision of zoning regulations,
- Strategy 3: Encourage review of communication regulations,
- Strategy 4: Research and develop automated tracking and detection devices,
- Strategy 5: Identify emerging new transit technologies and assess their practical use,
- Strategy 6: Utilize telecommunications to provide important route and trip planning information.

GOAL 2: TRANSPORTATION PLANS AND PROGRAMS WILL INTEGRATE THE INTERMODAL TRANSPORTATION NEEDS OF THE STATE.

OBJECTIVE A: Plan, manage, maintain and improve the Intermodal transportation system.

- Strategy 1: Take reasonable actions to make each trip flow smoothly,
- Strategy 2: Preserve and improve the system by prioritizing funding programs,
- Strategy 3: Implement management systems to improve the transportation system,
- Strategy 4: Analyze various modal alternatives to upgrade the transportation system,
- Strategy 5: Give special consideration for intermodal access to the Port of Lewiston.

OBJECTIVE B: Manage transportation demand.

- Strategy 1: Increase multiple occupancy vehicle use,
- Strategy 2: Coordinate all modes and provide public information,
- Strategy 3: Improve outreach programs for ridesharing & TSM/TDM strategies,
- Strategy 4: Promote public transport,
- Strategy 5: Consider multi-modal alternatives in high density corridors,
- Strategy 6: Develop and implement new transportation technologies,
- Strategy 7: Develop and implement congestion management system,
- Strategy 8: Implement the Intermodal management system.

OBJECTIVE C: Coordinate land use and transportation decisions.

- Strategy 1: Reduce transportation demand by land use design,
- Strategy 2: Strengthen interagency plan coordination and responsibilities.

OBJECTIVE D: Develop and maintain roadway, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities.

- Roadway Strategies:
- Strategy 1: Complete reconstruction & relocation of deficient segments,
- Strategy 2: Annually update the Recommended Roadway Widths Map,
- Strategy 3: Maintain existing system,
- Strategy 4: Apply new technology to improve rural transportation systems,
- Strategy 5: Coordinate federal lands projects with state and local projects to effectively utilize resources.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Strategies:

- Strategy 1: Develop and maintain bikeway networks,
- Strategy 2: Provide for pedestrian circulation and connection with other modes,
- Strategy 3: Encourage developers to:
 - 1) design mixed use and increased density,
 - 2) facilitate the use with other transportation services,
 - 3) reduce distances between destinations, and
 - 4) provide for convenience and safety,
- Strategy 4: Give priority for state/private funding to projects drawn from adopted bike/pedestrian plans.

OBJECTIVE E: Develop and improve access to the transit system.

- Strategy 1: Improve service efficiency and safety,
- Strategy 2: Provide assistance in new technologies and marketing,
- Strategy 3: Improve coordination of transit services with community activities,
- Strategy 4: Expand transit program marketing to educate the general public,
- Strategy 5: Improve reliability and safety by better equipment and training,
- Strategy 6: Promote reasonable security in high-risk areas,
- Strategy 7: Respond to needs of disabled, elderly, & culturally diverse population,
- Strategy 8: Facilitate transfers between transportation modes,
- Strategy 9: Encourage transit to and from recreation sites and rural areas,
- Strategy 10: Implement the Public Transportation Management System,
- Strategy 11: Plan and develop park and ride lots where appropriate.

OBJECTIVE F: Preserve essential rail freight and passenger service.

- Strategy 1: Work with major and shortline railroads and shippers to provide efficient and competitive service, economic stability, market access, and preservation of essential rail service,
- Strategy 2: Develop and implement an Intermodal Management System.
- Strategy 3: Cooperate with AMTRAK to improve service and facilities.

OBJECTIVE G: Preserve/expand aviation network.

- Strategy 1: Implement the Idaho Aviation System Plan,
- Strategy 2: Improve Intermodal service to Idaho's major airports.

Table 1-1 (Continued)

IDAHO TRANSPORTATION GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

GOAL 3: TRANSPORTATION DECISIONS WILL PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT AND PROMOTE ENERGY EFFICIENCY.

OBJECTIVE A: Protect and enhance the environment.

Strategy 1: Conduct environmental studies early-on,
Strategy 2: Protect sensitive wildlife habitats,
Strategy 3: Reduce or avoid impacts of toxic materials on the environment,
Strategy 4: Manage impacts on water quality,
Strategy 5: Expand use of effective mitigation and enhancement techniques,
Strategy 6: Recycle materials used in constructing, maintaining & operating the transportation system.

OBJECTIVE B: Integrate air quality and transportation decisions.

Strategy 1: Provide coordination between transportation and air quality agencies,
Strategy 2: Implement transportation control measures (TCMs) as identified in air quality plans and seek full funding of transit and air quality programs,
Strategy 3: Develop new and expanded vehicle emission control programs,
Strategy 4: Pursue modifications to the state and private-owned vehicle fleets,
Strategy 5: Assist transit operators in promoting public transportation as an alternative to the private vehicle.

OBJECTIVE C: Optimize the use of energy resources in transportation.

Strategy 1: Apply new and existing technologies to improve traffic flows,
Strategy 2: Promote use of public transit, vanpooling and carpooling,
Strategy 3: Increase use of alternate-fuel vehicles,
Strategy 4: Increase energy conservation research and development.

GOAL 4: FUNDING AND LICENSING MECHANISMS WILL REFLECT BROAD AND INNOVATIVE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INVESTMENT STRATEGIES.

OBJECTIVE A: Provide stable and flexible funding for transportation.

Strategy 1: Utilize all available funds to carry out the STIP,
Strategy 2: Study feasibility of collecting alternative user revenues,
Strategy 3: Update the Highway Cost Allocation Study biennially,
Strategy 4: Complete and distribute transportation financial reports,
Strategy 5: Continue integrating and automating the collection of vehicle and driver fees,
Strategy 6: Determine ways and means to collect transportation impact fees,
Strategy 7: Evaluate flexible funding and legislative options for public transportation,
Strategy 8: Vigorously campaign for full funding of ISTEA,
Strategy 9: Consider state funding for rail-service projects,
Strategy 10: Utilize all available licensing fees for transportation improvements,
Strategy 11: Seek reimbursable funding program whereby local governments can borrow funds to match federal-aid for highway and bridge projects,
Strategy 12: Provide information and education programs regarding the importance of efficient transportation systems to the well-being of the state's economy.

GOAL 5: TRANSPORTATION DECISION-MAKING PROCESS WILL PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERAGENCY COOPERATION, COORDINATION, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND PRIVATIZING PUBLIC WORKS AND SERVICES.

OBJECTIVE A: Provide a continuing and cooperative planning process between state and local jurisdictions.

Strategy 1: Initiate a cooperative transportation planning process with local elected officials for the non-metropolitan urban and rural areas of the state,
Strategy 2: Continue the cooperative transportation planning process for the metropolitan areas of the state.

OBJECTIVE B: Achieve transportation goals through public involvement and effective partnerships with capability to resolve conflicts.

Strategy 1: Provide for early and ongoing public and governmental involvement by all affected and interested parties,
Strategy 2: Cooperate on quickly resolving land use, transportation, and air quality concerns.

OBJECTIVE C: Promote privatization.

Strategy 1: Pursue agency partnerships in planning, developing, and delivering transportation services,
Strategy 2: Explore means to improve and increase public/private partnerships in privatizing public services.

OBJECTIVE D: Achieve county involvement in licensing strategies.

Strategy 1: Insure an efficient automated driver's license processing system that directly meets the needs of ITD and the counties,
Strategy 2: Maintain continuous contact and interaction with the county licensing offices through the use of regular meetings, training seminars, newsletters, and on-line services.

demand of industrial prospects is often paramount to their location and if rail is not the primary mode, it provides a viable alternate in today's mobility concerned climate. Even where direct rail service is not available, shipments in containers and trailers, the use of reload centers and other transfer facilities, makes rail service available to any business needing to transport freight.

Goal 2: Transportation Plans and Programs Will Integrate the Intermodal Transportation Needs of the State.

This Idaho transportation goal directly addresses rail in Objectives A and F, the maintenance and improvement of the intermodal system and preservation of essential freight and passenger service, respectively. The state's ability to impact the rail system is somewhat limited, however, due to a lack of funding. The state has depended on the federal Local Rail Freight Assistance Program (LRFA) for the preservation of local rail service, but the program has been a target of federal budget cuts since 1981. Funding for Fiscal Year 1995 totaled \$10 million nationwide, while at one time the program was funded on a much higher level. The future of Amtrak rail passenger service is also in jeopardy as described in Chapter 2. The indication here is also that state funding and more flexibility in expending Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act funds, not total reliance on LRFA funding, will be required in the future.

Goal 3: Transportation Decisions Will Protect the Environment and Promote Energy Efficiency.

While the rail mode and the movement of freight are not specifically mentioned in this goal, railroads are capable of moving tonnage with more fuel efficiency than other modes with the exception of water which has limitations on origins and destinations. Fuel efficiency equates to a corresponding reduction in the generation of particulate matter and other pollutants. Rail transportation has been effectively used in areas with air quality problems as a mitigation tool and should be fully considered in environmental and fuel conservation planning.

Goal 4: Funding and Licensing Mechanisms Will Reflect Broad and Innovative Public and Private Investment Strategies.

Addressing rail issues in the public arena has been a problem at times as it is largely domiciled in the private sector and the public has had little influence in decisions and in fact, the two sectors more often than not have different objectives given the for-profit orientation of private enterprise. On the other hand, the private sector does provide a viable transportation system, often without the need for public investment.

The involvement of the public sector in the rail mode is required when it desires the institution or maintenance of a non-profitable operation such as passenger service or freight lines with little traffic. These needs are recognized in strategies associated with Objective A concerning legislative options for funding public transportation, campaigning for full funding for ISTEA, and considering state funding for rail-service projects.

Goal 5: Transportation Decision-Making Process Will Provide Opportunities for Interagency Cooperation, Coordination, Public Involvement and Privatizing Public Works and Services.

Objective E is to promote privatization through partnerships in the provision of transportation services. This is, in fact, the manner in which the rail program has operated since its inception in Idaho. The Department has acted as a broker in matters concerning the abandonment/preservation of rail service and has leveraged relatively few public dollars with sizeable private investment to maintain/improve local rail service.

Rail-Specific Goals and Objectives

As the rail system in Idaho is controlled and operated by the private sector, the influence and role of the public sector in rail transportation is limited. The state of Idaho recognizes this fact will continue its present reliance upon privately owned railroads where possible in providing essential intra- and interstate rail services. However, it also recognizes and accepts the principle that individual lines must earn sufficient revenues to cover maintenance and operating expenses and provide the owning railroad with a reasonable return on the investment, but where this is not possible, there is a potential role for the public sector. It is within this basic philosophical framework that the following rail program goals and objectives have been formulated.

Goal I: A viable, competitive and safely operated rail system to serve the citizens of the state of Idaho.

- Objectives:**
- To remove outdated public institutional and regulatory barriers.
 - To level the playing field between transportation modes.
 - To coordinate rail planning and implementation activities with state and local land use policies and advocate mutually beneficial practices such as the preservation of industrial sites which can be served by rail.
 - To reduce the potential for at-grade rail-highway crossing accidents.

- To promote the development and improvement of rail-served intermodal transportation service throughout the state, freight and passenger.

Goal II: The retention and maintenance of operations over all lines of the rail system which serve as essential components of the state's transportation system.

- Objectives:**
- To identify endangered components of the rail system, define problems and causes, and formulate solutions.
 - To assure local decision makers understand the importance of retaining rail service and railroad economics.
 - To identify all potential sources of federal funds for application in problem situations.
 - To define a dedicated source of state funds for rail service preservation and to encourage the use of local funds.

Goal III: The preservation of rights-of-way of rail lines for which the prior goal can not be met for future rail or alternative uses.

- Objectives:**
- To assure local decision makers are aware of the potential to preserve rights-of-way through the federal Public Use and Interim Trail Use procedures.
 - To encourage localities to examine alternative uses of rights-of-way of endangered or abandoned rail lines.
 - To identify potential funding sources--federal, state and local--for right-of-way preservation.

Rail Planning Process

In order to ensure eligibility for federal funds, the Idaho Rail Plan is developed in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). While the rail plan addresses a number of appropriate rail-related issues, priority is placed on addressing those rail lines which are potentially subject to abandonment or reduced service levels in the short or long term. Emphasis is also placed on lines with substantial volumes of low revenue commodities (e.g. sawlogs), the abandonment of which could cause serious impacts on highways in terms of roadway damage, safety and congestion.

Abandonment candidates typically are derived from the universe of branch or light density lines. As the name implies, rail traffic is usually light on these lines. It may have always been that way, or more than likely, it is a result of erosion to competing modes over time. Regardless of the cause, the result is a revenue-cost relationship which sometimes does not permit the operator to earn an adequate return on its investment. The low level of revenue also means that costs have to be cut and this usually results in reductions in service and deferred maintenance which in turn causes deterioration of the physical plant and further erosion in service which translates to even less business.

The poor track conditions which result from long-term deferral of maintenance have to be corrected at some point, and when that occurs, there is some reluctance on behalf of the carrier to devote resources, for which there are many demands, to an expenditure with the prospects of marginal return. At this point, a true abandonment candidate could be developing and/or service levels are reduced due to poor track conditions.

Data Collection

Extensive data and information are gathered from rail users, railroads, industry representatives, published sources, etc. to perform detailed economic analysis. Potential capital improvement projects are prioritized through economic benefit-cost analysis.

Analyses

The analyses performed in the planning process attempt to determine the potential in economic impacts of railroad actions such as abandonments, spinoffs, mergers, and other actions on rail users, communities and the overall transportation system, including any impacts on highways.

Project Development and Administration

Once potential projects are identified and prioritized in the rail planning process, extensive negotiation takes place between the involved railroad and the Department. An overall rehabilitation plan must be developed and agreed upon which makes the best use of limited financial resources.

A detailed application to the FRA must be prepared, along with an agreement with the railroad. Once the application is approved and agreements executed, the railroad project is administered in a manner similar to highway projects (i.e., labor, material, and equipment charges must be verified; specifications must be met; schedules are to be kept; etc.). Detailed records are maintained and reports to FRA are required.

Special Activities

Rail program staff are constantly involved in railroad issues, problems, and policy questions on the local, state, and national levels, such as rail mergers and consolidations, rail passenger service, rail safety, short line railroads, tourist railroads, and special projects such as the railroad relocation project in Sandpoint. In the case of the latter, approximately 3.5 miles of the former Spokane International Railroad now Union Pacific (UP), will be abandoned and trains will run over Burlington Northern Railroad (BN) trackage. The UP cuts the town in half and causes delay and potential accident problems due to 22 crossings with passive protection only. Most of the problems will be solved with relocation, and the abandoned right-of-way is to be purchased for future transportation improvements.

Projects Implemented

The major rail project accomplishment in Idaho has been the rehabilitation of 71 miles of trackage of the St. Maries River Railroad. This railroad, a common-carrier railroad running from Plummer to St. Maries to Bovill, was formed from the lines of the bankrupt Milwaukee Road, which abandoned or sold all its trackage in Idaho in 1980. Over \$4.5 million in federal funds and the local match provided by the St. Maries River Railroad have been invested to literally pull this railroad out of the mud. A massive tie replacement, rail relay, and bridge rehabilitation program have turned the railroad from a 5-10 mph operation with frequent derailments to a 25-mph railroad.

This project has not only enhanced the competitive position of the beleaguered forest products industry in northern Idaho, but it has provided jobs and opportunities for economic expansion. Approximately 300 jobs at Idaho lumber mills and 25 railroad jobs were maintained because the assistance made a crucial difference in continuing essential rail services to the mills that are dependent on it. In addition, several mills on the railroad have expanded production knowing that the railroad will be there to move their products to distant markets not reachable by truck. Hundreds of thousands of rail carloads of logs and other commodities have been moved by rail instead of over state highways.

Railroad - Highway Crossing Program

The National Railroad-Highway Crossing Program, which includes all such crossings within the state, is maintained by the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) in accordance with Federal Railroad Administration regulations. The ITD is responsible for entering updated information received from railroad companies into the state inventory.

A list of priority crossings is developed from the National Railroad-Highway Crossing Program, using the following criteria:

- Existing protection
- Average Daily Traffic
- Number of trains per day
- Number of tracks per crossing
- Through night trains
- Number of accidents

All crossings are arranged by accident potential from high to low, and those having a potential of one or more within the next ten years are reviewed every year. When these crossings are under local jurisdiction, the agencies are contacted to see if they would care to develop projects to improve the crossings with federal aid. If a local agency desires a project, it must make a formal request to the ITD through the Department's district office.

When a crossing is being considered for improvement, a diagnostic study team is set up. This team includes professional people associated with the disciplines of administration, design, operations, maintenance and law enforcement, and represents railroad companies, highway agencies, and state and local government. To ensure appropriate representation on the team, members are chosen from the following disciplines:

- Traffic Engineer with Highway Safety experience
- Railroad Signal Engineer
- Railroad Administrative Official(s)
- State Government Official(s)
- Local Government Official(s)
- School Official(s)
- Law Enforcement Officer(s)
- Federal Highway Administration Official(s)

The study team conducts a field review of the crossings in question and decides whether additional warning devices (i.e., railroad signing, signals and other safety improvements) are warranted, and if so, which should be used and what design standards should be established. After the field review, the sponsoring local agency is advised as to whether the project is eligible for federal aid, or not, and if it is, what the next steps are to develop the project.

To start a project, any Local Public Agency (LPA) wanting federal participation on Railroad-Highway Crossing projects may contact the Local Roads Coordinator at the nearest ITD district office for help. Ultimately, the LPA must make formal application through the ITD district office by submitting a letter, requesting federal participation, and enclosing form ITD-2435, "Local Federal Aid Project Request", and a vicinity map.

Once the eligibility for federal aid has been confirmed and the project description has been reviewed by ITD staff and management, the project is presented to the Idaho Transportation Board for approval. If approved, it will be included in the Board approved Highway Development Program. An agreement is then prepared, to be entered into by the ITD and the LPA. By signing and returning the agreement along with a remittance covering the LPA's deposit, project development is initiated.

The State/Local Agreement (Preliminary Engineering) describes the responsibilities of each party and the amount of deposit required of the LPA to pay for the incidental services to be provided by the ITD in developing the project. The State/Local Agreement (Preliminary Engineering) will be prepared by the Roadway Design Section and forwarded to the LPA for signature. A resolution is necessary if there is less than a quorum signing the agreement. A copy of the standard agreement form is available from ITD district offices or ITD's Local Roads Engineer.

A listing of Board-approved Railroad-Highway Crossing projects is contained in the current State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

Past Planning Efforts

ITD feels one of the key responsibilities under this program is to provide a proactive and systematic review and analysis of possible future rail abandonments in order to determine if the circumstances leading to abandonment can be corrected before the problems of a line become unsolvable. Once conditions for an abandonment exist, finding a cure and the time to develop it can be very difficult. As a result, increased emphasis on longer range planning has occurred. While it is still important to have a handle on factors involving rail lines which have been announced by the railroad as being subject to abandonment, more emphasis is being placed on trying to identify which lines might be endangered in the future. Therefore, in addition to project implementation, the Department has been engaged in major rail planning efforts in the past.

Palouse Regional Studies

Since 1970, nearly 300 miles of track in north central Idaho and southeastern Washington have been abandoned. With an eye toward preventing such losses in the future, the Department, in conjunction with the Washington State Department of Transportation, completed the Palouse Empire Regional Rail Study in 1987.

The Palouse study evaluated the economics of the remaining rail system and identified alternative methods for retaining essential rail service. It served as a tool for shippers, communities, and local officials who have a stake in preserving rail service in their regions.

As an outgrowth of that study, the Department has worked for several years with the Camas Prairie and Burlington Northern railroads, shippers, and communities to determine the actual financial feasibility of a Palouse regional railroad. This effort has been crucial to any hopes of retaining rail service in the region in the long term.

Railroad Restructuring

While line abandonments will still occur where continuation of service is just not justified, current railroad rationalization programs also consist of packaging and selling light density lines to regional or local railroads or short lines as they are often called. There is a nationwide increase in the formation of "short line" railroads. These are usually formed from line segments spun off from Class I railroads such as the Burlington Northern or Union Pacific. The primary advantages of short line operation are a lower labor cost base and with a local presence, the ability to develop additional business resulting in operating viably where larger railroads could not.

In the Fall of 1990, UP had over 1,900 miles in the process of being spun off. Included in this total was the 321 Idaho miles in the so called Boise Group that was to be acquired by Intermountain Western Railroad, the first Idaho spinoff. Concerned about possible future abandonment, the Department performed an evaluation of the UP - Intermountain Western proposal. The Department's study verified the marginal nature of the rail operations to be conveyed.

This sale subsequently fell through but some of the properties eventually were spun off for operation by the Idaho Northern and Pacific (see Chapter 2 for a more detailed description). The UP continued line spinoffs in Idaho with a number of lines in eastern Idaho now operated by the Eastern Idaho Railroad (see Chapter 2). In late 1994, both railroads submitted lines to be analyzed for rehabilitation utilizing FY 1995 Local Rail Freight Assistance funding, the results of which are contained in Chapter 4.

In January 1996, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad announced that the company is considering the sale of approximately 4,000 miles of light density lines. The BNSF said the company is putting together line segment packages for prospective buyers that would create a better opportunity for viable, long-term rail service to shippers and keep revenue flowing to BNSF.

Among the lines that will likely be made available in 1996 are the following lines in the Palouse Area: Marshall (Spokane), WA to Palouse, WA; Palouse to Bovill, ID; Palouse to Moscow, ID; Moscow to Arrow, ID; Cheney, WA to Davenport, WA; Davenport to Coulee, WA.

Unfortunately, the abandoned Moscow to Arrow line segment and parts of the Palouse to Bovill line were seriously damaged by flooding in February of 1996. There is some question as to whether these lines will ever be put back into service because the high costs of repairing the lines may not be justified for BNSF nor a short line carrier.

Public Review Process

This rail plan is one modal element of the overall statewide transportation plan. Potential rail projects are identified in the 1996 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and subsequent updates as encouraged by ISTEA. The STIP is updated annually and will identify rail project funding needs for at least a two-year period. The STIP goes through an extensive statewide public involvement process. Amendments to the rail plan will be developed periodically, as the needs arise. In the past, the statutory deadline for submitting Local Rail Freight Assistance (LRFA) project applications for entitlement and discretionary funding to FRA is October 1 and January 1 for each fiscal year, respectively. (No LRFA funds were available for fiscal year 1996 and beyond at the time this document was printed.)

At a minimum, for the State Rail Plan, updates and amendments thereof, the Department shall hold a public hearing if, on the basis of reasonable public notice appearing in the press (including the press in any area where a project is proposed), there is sufficient public interest to justify a hearing. Public notice shall be given, in accordance with applicable State law and practice concerning comparable matters, that a draft of the State Rail Plan is available for public inspection at a reasonable time in advance of the hearing. The Department shall enable local and regional governmental bodies, railroads, shippers and others with an interest in rail transportation to review and comment on appropriate elements of the State Rail Plan.

The Idaho Transportation Department, in April 1996, sent out letters, news releases and legal notices announcing the availability of the 1996 Rail Plan and opportunity for a public hearing. Copies of the plan or letters announcing availability of the plan and opportunity for a hearing were forwarded to local and regional governmental agencies, libraries, railroads, shippers and others with an interest in rail transportation to review and comment on appropriate elements of the plan. The legal notice was published throughout the state in nineteen newspapers. No one requested the department to hold a public hearing on the plan.

A summary of public comments received on the Draft Idaho State Rail Plan is included as Appendix E.